Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 4359

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PORG, PBOR, MILI, LE, IS, UN
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: RED HERRINGS ON THE HASBANI

REF: TEL AVIV 9718

1. WE SUSPECT ISRAELIS ARE VICTIMS OF THEIR OWN PROPAGANDA IN ALLEGING THERE ARE SYRIAN TROOPS WITH LEBANESE COLUMN OR THAT LEBANESE HAVE PLANS TO DROP TROOPS OFF AT MARJAYOUN OR ELSEWHERE.

2. REGARDING THE FIRST HERRING, AS REPORTED IN OUR 4346, THERE WAS A SMALL SYRIAN ESCORT WHICH ACCOMPANIED COLUMN AS FAR AS KAWKABA. ABDO UNDERSTANDS IT HAS SINCE GONE BACK NORTH. NEWSPHOTOS HERE SHOW SINGLE SYRIAN TRUCK IN FRONT, WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT CAPTAIN CHAABAN TOLD ME. BOTH ABDO AND BOUTROS HAVE ASSURED ME THERE IS NOT A SINGLE SYRIAN SOLDIER IN THE CONTINGENT AND I BELIEVE
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THEM. SO DO MY FRENCH AND BRITISH COLLEAGUES. DO NOT BELIEVE WE ARE ALL DUPES.

3. REGARDING THE SECOND HERRING, I FORGOT TO REPORT LAST NIGHT THAT I RAISED WITH BOUTROS ISRAELI FEARS THAT LEBANESE MIGHT BE TRYING TO DROP OFF TROOPS AT MARJAYOUN. HE SAID THIS IS ABSOLUTE HOGWASH. ABDO RECONFIRMS THIS MORNING.

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4. I READ TO ABDO AND BOUTROS OVER PHONE THE SIX POINTS IN PARA 3 REFTEL AND AM SENDING TEXT OF THAT PARA AS WELL AS PARAS 7 AND 9 TO ABDO. THE IDEA OF GOING BY SMALL UNITS MAY BE THE WAY OUT, BUT ABDO IMMEDIATELY ASKED, WITH WHOM DO THEY THINK WE WILL NEGOTIATE? WITH HADDAD? THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE. WITH ISRAELIS? DOES THAT MEAN THEY ADMIT THEY ARE HOLDING UP THE COLUMN?

5. I ALSO READ TO BOUTROS PRAGMATIC APPROACH PROPOSED BY DEPARTMENT IN ITS 193265 AND HE ASKED FOR TEXT SO HE COULD SHOW TO PRESIDENT. HAVE SENT IT TO HIM VIA ABDO.

6. COMMENT: THE REAL PROBLEM IS HADDAD. DISCUSSED ISSUE AT SOME LENGTH WITH MY FRENCH AND BRITISH COLLEAGUES THIS MORNING. WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER LEBANESE ACTUALLY HAD A DEAL WITH HIM WHICH ISRAELIS FORCED HIM TO REPUDIATE, OR WHETHER LEBANESE WERE ENGAGED IN WISHFUL THINKING. IN ANY EVENT, IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT WE CANNOT TAKE AT FACE VALUE WHAT ISRAELIS TELL US ABOUT HADDAD'S ATTITUDE, NOR CAN WE EXPECT HADDAD TO SPEAK FREELY IN PRESENCE OF ISRAELI LIAISON OFFICER. SUGGEST IT WOULD BE VERY USEFUL IF RESPONSIBLE AMERICAN OFFICER WITH UNIFIL COULD GET TOGETHER PRIVATELY WITH HADDAD AND FIND OUT JUST WHAT IT IS HE HAS IN MIND. COL. LEVRETTE (SP?) SOUNDS LIKE THE SORT OF PERSON TO DO THE JOB. IF ISRAELIS ARE UNWILLING TO

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LET HADDAD SEE SOMEONE LIKE HIM PRIVATELY, IT WOULD BE PRETTY CLEAR INDICATION HADDAD IS THEIR PRISONER AND HAS NO FREEDOM TO ACT ON HIS OWN.

7. WHILE LEBANESE OPERATION HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY GOOD DEAL OF MISESTIMATION AND FAULTY PLANNING, IT HAS AT LEAST HAD VIRTUE OF CRYSTALLIZING AMORPHOUS SITUATION. IT SHOULD SOONN BE CLEAR WHO IS DOING WHAT TO WHOM DOWN THERE. IF, AS ISRAELIS CLAIM, IT WAS HADDAD WHO ORDERED THE FIRING ON TROOPS OF HIS OWN ARMY AND MINED THE ROAD TO PREVENT THEIR MOVING FURTHER, THEN HE WILL HAVE BURNED HIS BRIDGES WITH LEBANON PRETTY THOROUGHTLY. PARKER

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